Cornel West, "Reconstructing the American Left: The Challenge of Jesse Jackson," *Social Text* 11 (1984), 3-19.

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.
W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)

He was getting tired of Negroes and their rights. It was a miserable recognition, and on many a count, for if he felt even a hint this way, then what immeasurable tides of rage must be loose in America itself?
Norman Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (1968)

Jesse Jackson's bid for the Democratic nomination constituted the most important challenge to the American left since the emergence of the civil rights movement in the fifties and the feminist movement in the seventies. Unfortunately, the American left, for the most part, missed this grand opportunity. In this essay, I will argue that this failure to respond in a serious and sustained manner to the contemporary black political upsurge signifies the need for a reassessment and reconstruction of the American left—a rearticulation of progressive forces centered on anti-imperialist struggles (against U.S. and Soviet forms) and black unity (a unity open to non-black allies yet subordinate to no non-black groups).

Setting the American Stage

The basic thesis of my argument should be viewed as neither apocalyptic nor alarming; it simply confronts the complex and contradictory nature of progressive forces in this country. These forces are complex and contradictory primarily because of the distinct American terrain upon which they reside. The American left has been shaped by the dynamic yet persistant features of American life—features that have imposed constraints upon the left's ability to flourish. The most crucial brute fact about the American terrain is that the USA began as a liberal capitalist nation permeated with

patriarchal oppression and based, in large part, upon a slave economy. These beginnings facilitated the ideological predominance of an American-style liberalism which, on the one hand, promoted the sanctity of private property, the virtue of capital accumulation and the subordination of women and, on the other hand, encouraged the flowering of a slave-based society principally upon the ideological pillar of the inferiority of noneuropeans, especially Africans. This native form of liberalism was engendered not by opposition to feudalism as in Europe but rather by securing property-owning white male consensus in order to maintain social stability. Motivated by notions of new beginnings, edenic innocence and exemplary performance, the anti-colonial sentiments of the nation entailed an abiding distrust of institutional power, bureaucracy and, above all, the state. Despite unprecedented proliferation of voluntary associations, American political discourse placed great emphasis on the welfare of propertied persons as atomistic individuals rather than as community dwellers or citizens of a republic.

This liberal ideology of Americanism embodied the ideals of bourgeois freedom (such as the freedom to own property, accumulate capital, speak one's mind and organize to worship) and formal equality (equal treatment under the law)—circumscribed by racist and sexist constraints. These ideological origins indeed have undergone change and transformation over time, yet their traces strongly persist in contemporary American political culture and ideology. To put it crudely, most Americans even now-be they of the right of the left-are highly individualistic, libertarian, anti-statist as well as racist and sexist.

The infamous "gift of suffrage" to the white male component of the working class without the need for organized proletarian organization—in fact prior to widespread industrialization hence

substantive industrial class formation—yielded deep allegiance of the white male populace to the existing political order. This political arrangement of coalitional politics and political machines within the framework of a two-party system channeled organizational efforts of class, race and gender into practical interest group struggles and thereby relegated oppositional movements to either ill-fated third parties or political oblivion. Furthermore, harsh state repression has been exercised against perceived extremists who threaten the tenuous consensus which the liberal ideology of Americanism reinforces. This ingenious political setup encourages diverse modes of interest group articulation and permits incremental social change; it also domesticates oppositional movements, dilutes credible wholesale programs of social change and discourages sustained organizational efforts at undermining the liberal consensus. The political predicament of the American left has been and remains that of ideological purity and political irrelevance or ideological compromise and political marginality.

Extraordinary American productivity principally owing to tremendous technological innovation (motivated, in part, by labor shortages), abundant natural resources (secured by imperialist domination of indigenous peoples) and cheap labor (usually imported from various parts of the globe) has enabled social upward mobility unknown in the modern world. The availability of goods, luxuries and conveniences which has made comfort an American obsession—to significant segments of the population gives the appearance of a widely fluid social structure. This perception provides credence to the Horatio Alger dimension of the liberal ideology of Americanism: the possibility of rags-to-riches success for all. Even the lower classes remain enchanted by this seductive ideological drama.

High levels of productivity, with uneven expressions across various regions of the country, have made the commitment to economic growth an unquestioned national dogma. From the far right (for whom growth is a symptom of liberty) to the sophisticated left (for whom growth makes easier redistribution), Americans remain captive to the notion of economic expansion. This dogma undergirds the consensus of American-style liberalism and thereby views as natural necessity the close partnership of the state, banks and large corporations and their coordinated expansionist activities abroad—with often repressive consequences for the native populations. This partnership, along with its imperialist extension, is the linchpin of the American terrain.

Historical Components of the American Left

The American left consists of those indigenous social movements—and the sensibilities, values and viewpoints generated by them—which call into question and seek to undermine the consensus of the liberal ideology of Americanism on behalf of the disenfranchised and disadvantaged. In the American past, seven social forces constitute the most salient and sustained forms of such opposition: civic republicanism, populism, trade-unionism, communitarianism, feminism, socialism (which includes communism and anarchism) and black radicalism. By highlighting these seven expressions of the American left, I do not deny the significance of other expressions: such as Latino, Native American, Asian, gay, lesbian, peace or ecological oppositional movements. I am simply suggesting that these latter forms of the American left have not played as central a role as have the seven forms I will examine. The present picture indeed is rapidly changing. But my aim in this section is to scrutinize briefly the major historical modes of the American left, with an eye toward their capacity (or incapacity) for reactivation and rearticulation. My historicist

bias here assumes that we can more fully grasp the significance of "new" social movements when we have reassessed the roles played by the older ones. Civic republicanism is often overlooked as a progressive social force in American history, though able leftist proponents such as Robert Bellah and Sheldon Wolin keep us mindful of it. This noteworthy discourse, which for some time has lacked an immediate constituency, puts forward a grand vision of a virtuous and participatory citizenry within a democratic nation with broad economic equality and decentralized political authority. Its Jeffersonian and Jacksonian versions once seized the imagination of urban artisans, agricultural entrepreneurs and anti-bourgeois (as opposed to anti-capitalist) intellectuals. Civic republicanism is important not as a social movement but as a social force in the form of a political discourse. It is crucial because it plays a formative role in the history of American progressive political language. Civic republicanism has shaped perceptions, attitudes, habits, hence political praxis of American opositional movements, from populism to black radicalism. This is so primarily because civic republicanism served as one of the ideological pillars of the country's first collective definition, its initial national self-understanding.

This originary American ideology projects a noble ideal of citizens' participation in the decision-making processes of the institutions which guide and regulate their lives—unencumbered by mystifying forms of mediation such as manipulative political parties, relatively empty periodic rituals of passive voting and alienating centralized bureaucracies. Civic republicanism can be construed as an American-style revolt against the modern industrial order; its more vulgar versions succumb to romantic nostalgia for a mythical democratic *Gemeinschaft* or egalitarian Greek polis. In its more refined forms, civic republicanism generates powerful critiques of industrial capitalism (and

communism) and persuasive defenses of democratic modes of economic, political and cultural life. Such critiques and defenses invoke memories and distant echoes in American life, yet they seldom, if ever, surface in a potent organizational form. In this regard, civic republicanism is a political anachronism with little capacity to create or sustain a social movement. Yet, as a political discourse with deep roots in American history, it contains precious values, insights and visions indispensable for any acceptable leftist movement.

In stark contrast to civic republicanism, populism has been a potent and powerful progressive force in American history. Yet it has rarely sustained a movement over a decade. Populism initially was the political ideology of principally immiserated yeoman farmers (fearing social slippage into tenantry), exploited tenant laborers (in quest of becoming yeoman farmers) and irate marginal industrial workers in staunch opposition to capitalist control of land and crops—especially the crop lien system which rendered farmers and intermittent laborers perennially indebted to merchant bankers. Populist ideology, drawing freely from civic republican discourse, promoted oppositional institution-building in which the ideals of community and cooperative relations were paramount. It accented local control of banks, decentralized economic relations, small-scale political institutions, limited property ownership and intimate social interaction. Unlike civic republicanism, populism constituted organizational forms which reached its peak in the South-wide Alliance struggle of the 1880s and its outgrowth, the People's Party of the 1890s. Like civic republicanism, populism is difficult to understand in terms of traditional 20th-century leftist categories. It indeed was neither anti-capitalist nor revolutionary. But it presented a serious challenge to the existing order. Populism resurged in more diluted and desperate forms in Huey Long's Share Our Wealth Plan and, to a

degree, in Father Coughlin's National Union For Social Justice during the Great Depression. Again the central foe was a process of centralization which rendered local communities and persons economically dependent (and socially stationary) on impersonal, bureaucratic forms of capital. For example, processes of modern merchandizing such as the chain store and mail-order house that pushed out local merchants invoked venom from such 20th-century populists. Different from earlier populism, Long and Coughlin neither engaged in serious institution-building nor sustained local control efforts. Instead, they appealed to the federal government to enact and enforce policies against centralized capital. Such feeble gestures to federal power already in relative cooperation with banks and large corporations signified the degree to which populism had lost its substance and vision—and soon to become a mere interest group within the Democratic Party. Antiquated avatars of populism limp on in our own time invoking pastoral visions of localized arrangements or projecting "traditional" values of bygone communities without probing into their repressive effects. Needless to say, the Achilles heel of populism was its xenophobia and isolationism: after early efforts at interracial solidarity, both 19th and 20th-century populism has been viciously racist and pro-imperialist. Yet, it contains elements which should be integral to any acceptable leftist movement: local activism, politics of everyday life of ordinary people and discernible forms of peoples' empowerment.

American trade-unionism has a distinguished though deeply flawed history. Reflecting more a craft than class consciousness, with the great exception of The Knights of Labor between 1869 and 1887, the trade-union movement has consistently missed grand opportunities primarily due to its captivity to racism. More than civic republicanism and even populism, the organized efforts of the

working class in this country have faltered at the altar of exclusion of and indifference to black, yellow, brown and red workers. And though the gallant struggles of racist white workers have contributed to progressive policies and legislation, the trade-union movement has been as much self-limited as delimited by hostile social forces.

Trade-unionism reached its peak with the infusion of white industrial and unskilled laborers and workers of color in the thirties and forties (the years of the grand CIO) promoted by inspired communists, socialists and black activists. This peak quickly slid back into a cold war plateau and recently has slid further to an unfortunate nadir. With its close ties to cold war foreign policies, its racist legacy, and its myopic top-down bureaucratic leadership and operations up against widespread deindustrialization and tough anti-labor policies of a conservative administration—the future of trade-unionism looks bleak. This perception results, in part, from leftist expectations of the trade-union movement (often guided by Marxist hopes) which tend to be exorbitant. No movement can be measured by the standards of *Logos*. But most signs indicate that the movement lacks the imagination and will to response to the present conservative assault. I would go as far as to suggest that it is principally the tireless progressive warriors of a past era and the fresh new minority and women workers who sustain and give life to the movement today. How long this will keep it going remains an open question. Can there be a substantive American left without a vital trade-union movement? Yes, but it would be extremely difficult.

Communitarianism is an American form of utopian radicalism which is unabashedly proud of its utopianism. In the face of a left influenced by Marx's anti-utopianism, some American radicals, acting upon a deep voluntaristic impulse in American culture, have periodically and persistently

attempted to build their own communities of peace, justice and freedom. The significance of these movements is not their failure but their motivation for trying to succeed against such overwhelming odds. The basic motivation is a profound pessimism regarding the fundamental transformation of American society. In this regard, communitarianism has served as a principled though desperate alternative to opportunistic sellout to a seductive Americanism after realizing that revolution is a long process, not an imminent event. Like all encapsulating practices, it presupposes ideological and cultural homogeneity—and usually some degree of luxury. The very act of choosing to subversively cop-out of mainstream society often means that neither oppressive social circumstances nor limited economic opportunities forced one to tragically cop-out (as with many underclass youth). Communitarianism is the agonized conscience of American radicalism. When all is well it wanes, but since all is never really well, it persists (in various forms) keeping radicals honest.

Feminism is the most impressive contemporary movement in America. Historically rooted in the 19th-century abolitionist movement, independent and autonomous up to the acquisition of voting rights in the early twenties and surfacing again with fervor and ferment in the late sixties and seventies, feminism (understood as the multi-dimensional struggle against sexual discrimination and gender oppression and for women's freedom) constitutes the most vibrant form of American radicalism on the present scene. This is so, in part, because highly politicized white middle class women in the aftermath of the civil rights movement made sexual inequality a national issue. They were able to do this primarily because black inequality (after much struggle, bloodshed and many deaths) had become a legitimated national issue. And by comparing and relating sexual oppression to black oppression, the women's movement could more easily move toward national attention. Let me

hastily add, I do not object to such a procedure of legitimation. But it certainly lends itself to vulgar displacement of black concerns to white middle class women concerns by the powers that be. Of course, liberal versions of feminism became the major focus. Yet, dialogues and struggles with black, brown, yellow and red feminists as well as the emergence of organized lesbians have moved even liberal feminists to new heights.

The progressive appeal of feminism at the moment is its ability to show how power relations permeate the most taken-for-granted (or "natural") everyday language, mores and folkways. For many white middle strata people-relatively unacquainted with self-perceptions of victimization—these revelations of subordination are deeply transformative. Therefore, feminism has been able to articulate a politics of culture which often eventuates in new agents against sexist oppression. Like the populism of old, contemporary feminism has initiated a process of building an oppositional culture which puts pressures on public discourse and practices, thereby enlarging discursive boundaries and political perimeters. These oppositional cultural efforts may stand at a distance (as with socialist feminists) or within (as with liberal feminists) the higher echelons of power. And as the presence and influence of womanists of color escalates, American feminism could nearly set the terms for the future of the American left.

Socialism, including communism and anarchism, are not "indigenous" forms of radicalism in the way earlier ones are. There is indeed an indigenous tradition of socialism, communism and anarchism in America, but the discourses themselves did not take deep roots here. They are often viewed as European imports—examples of travelling theories and ideologies which gained the attention of significant sections of the secular American left. Anarchism, with its stress on

libertarianism and anti-statism, is the most amenable of European progressive ideologies to American political culture, but ironically, it has been the least attractive of such ideologies. Socialism became a substantive American possession only after it was buttressed by ex-Populist support in the Southwest and infused with evangelical fervor by Midwest proletarians and Northeast immigrant Jews. The socialist movement, led by Eugene Debs, in the first decade or so of this century was a noteworthy force in American life. Though unable to compete with urban immigrant political machines, unwilling to recruit seriously people of color and crushed by the Palmer Raids and other such acts of state repression, the socialist movement introduced the Marxist notions of class struggle and international solidarity to American political culture—a culture of clashing political factions and interest groups after short-term material gain and social status.

The collapse of the American socialist movement was not August 1914 as in Europe but October 1917. It never recovered after the Bolshevik Revolution. With much justification, American socialism has neither forgotten nor forgivenLenin and Trotsky for traducing the democratic ideals of socialism. And, again with much justification, fierce opposition to Stalin became a litmus test for any recognizable socialist. Yet, in regard to organization, the red torch passed from the Socialist Party to the Communist Party after 1921. And the socialist movement did not recuperate until 1982, with the coming together of democratic socialists, social democrats, pragmatic progressives and cultural leftists to form DSA (Democratic Socialists of America).

Communism was an alien ideology to Americans not only because Marxist terminology had to travel from Europe, but also because Soviet orders had to travel from Russia. This terminology and these orders did not deter thousands of young idealistic students, dedicated second-generation

immigrant workers and, for the first time in American radicalism, significant numbers of black urban dwellers. The central appeal to black people-the call for black national self-determination-catered to black nationalist sentiments enacted by the Garvey movement in the early twenties. This appeal resulted in the most racially integrated organization in the country. In this regard, the communist movement created and sustained the only American oppositional culture (with a white majority) in this century which took racism seriously as a foe and enemy.

As noted earlier, the Communist Party pushed the trade-union movement in an unprecendented manner in the thirties. The Party underwent persecution and self-destruction in the forties and had nearly collapsed by the early sixties. It benefitted from the turn to orthodox Marxisms after the demise of the New Left in the late sixties and seventies, and presently persists as radical fire under urban reform and trade union activism-while their treacherous link to the Soviet Union remains intact.

At last, we come to black radicalism, in its integrationist and nationalist forms. Black radicalism is the oldest form of American radicalism. In fact, like the revolts of indigenous peoples, it predates America itself. The unique burden of black radicalism is that it has usually found itself struggling not only against racism in American society, but also against racism in American radicalism. Black resistance is the most "indigenous" form of American radicalism precisely because racism has been the most visible and vicious form of oppression in American society. This is so not because the genocidal attacks on indigenous peoples have been less brutal or the exploitation of Chinese and Latino laborers have been less harsh, but rather because systematic dehumanization of Africans was an economic necessity and ideological pillar for those who founded the nation. Africans

were an integral—in some ways the most important—component in the actual operations of American society. And in the American psyche, Africans have been and remain literal victims and metaphorical symbols of oppression within American society.

Black radicalism is a product of a distinct culture of survival and sustenance. Bred in a unique black Christian culture, it is moralistic in motivation yet often opportunistic in practice. Its mode of leadership is inveterately charismatic, and usually messianic. Its protean and improvisational efforts to promote black dignity and secure black progress makes it suspicious of Euro-American "isms," be they of the right or the left. But consistent moral action and political loyalty by others produces genuine black acceptance and allegiance.

Black radicalism has not been as it could be precisely because other forms of American radicalism have not been radical enough-radical enough to embrace black people as equals in their ranks. Black integrationism (as opposed to black assimilationism) has continually attempted to fuse with other forms of American radicalism, but rarely has it been welcome. Black nationalism (as opposed to black separatism) resulted from a recognition of the cultural distinctiveness of Afro-Americans conjoined with the brutal lessons of white exclusion; it feeds on a healthy pessimism regarding the possibilites of black freedom in racist white America. Like the religious culture from which it flows, black radicalism hopes against hope if only to hold out the dream of freedom in a never-never land (be it American society for integrationists or a black nation for nationalists) in order to survive in the deplorable present.

Black integrationism is often viewed as more realistic and practical than black nationalism. Yet, opportunism—unprincipled scrambling for crumbs—is usually the result for both forms. The

oscillation between deep moralism, inescapable opportunism and aggressive pessimism is found in the exemplary careers of major black figures: the political shifts of Frederick Douglass from revolutionary to U.S. Ambassador, the patronage bargains of Booker T. Washington who was a Knight of Labor before it opted for black deportation to Liberia, the long and winding maneuvers of W.E.B. Du Bois whose faith in America faded from decade to decade until only Nkrumah's Ghana could hold his spirit, the resoluted quest for black dignity at any cost of Marcus Garvey and the bitter perception of American "sickness" by Martin Luther King, Jr. at the end of his life. After protracted struggle, all recognized that there could be no serious American left without a vital black radicalism, yet the American left shunned black radicalism when such radicalism was expressed in self-defining terms.

The Challenge of the Jackson Campaign

The Jackson intervention into American left practices epitomizes the imposed isolation of black radicalism. Even in a period of immense national and international crisis, this isolation persists. In the midst of militaristic policies abroad and domestic efforts to decrease transfer payments to the needy, diminish public worker protection, erode unemployment compensation, dilute environmental regulation, expand low wage markets and augment incentives and abatements to corporations and firms, the American left continues to hold black radicalism at arm's length. This is seen most clearly in the Jackson campaign. There is no doubt that the Jackson campaign is unique in American and Afro-American history. He is neither the first black person to run for the Presidency nor the first to have influence on the leadership of the Democratic Party. But he is the first serious black candidate for President to seize the imagination of the masses of black people (with over 20%

of black voters casting ballots for the first time) and make some inroads among Latinos, Asians, Native Americans and whites.

Jesse Jackson and Black Politics

The significance of the Jackson campaign is best understood in light of the history of black politics in 20th-century America. Most black people entered this century deprived of formal political rights, including the right to vote and hold political office. Legalized exclusion from the political process in the predominantly rural American South—where over 90% of black people lived in 1900—ensured black political powerlessness. Those few black people in the urban American north had limited access to political participation owing to the gerrymandering of black districts which diffused and disarmed black political power.

The first milestones in black politics in this century were the elections of two black men to Congress: Chicago's Oscar DePriest in 1928 and New York's Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. in 1944. DePriest's election resulted from white political patronage: a ten year process of black inclusion in William Thompson's Republican city machine. Powell's victory rested upon independent black political organization: a militant church-based mobilization in Harlem. The mantle of the Republican DePriest was passed to Arthur Mitchell (a Republican turned Democrat) in 1934 and then to Democrat William Dawson from 1942 to 1971. Powell remained in office until 1970. The low-keyed, pragmatic style of Dawson and the audacious, aggressive style of Powell dominated the first stage of black politics in this century.

With the limited but unprecedented success of the civil rights movement, substantive racist barriers for black political participation were removed. And black political presence grew principally

in the form of mayors in crucial urban centers, officials on the local and state levels and members of Congress. This second stage of black politics spawned the creation of a black political class: a heterogeneous group of black elected officials who constituted the political elite of the black community. Riding the crest of black group consciousness generated by the Black Power movement in the late sixties, most of these politicians ingeniously seized this opportunity to consolidate black participation in electoral politics. Soon major cities such as Cleveland, Newark, Detroit, Gary and later Los Angeles, Atlanta, Chicago, Birmingham and Philadelphia had black mayors. And the Black Congressional Caucus had grown to seventeen. Presently, this black political class -along with the heads of the traditional civil rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Urban League and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference—comprise the major leadership in black America.

The Jackson candidacy for the Democratic nomination goes far beyond the political patronage of DePriest and Dawson, the flamboyant flair of Powell and the cautious maneuvers of the new black political class. Yet, elements of this past haunt Jackson's efforts. His monumental campaign is bold, fearless and daring. Yet its practical success still depends on its capacity to broker with Democratic Party elites. The challenge remains for Jackson to translate an exciting and captivating campaign into concrete political payoff and to sustain the movement quality of this momentum after the November elections.

This challenge primarily consists of building an organization to sustain Jackson's black-dominated "rainbow" coalition. Such a task will be difficult owing to three basic reasons. First, Jackson's charismatic style of leadership accentuates spontane ous and enthusiastic attraction at the

expense of creating enduring infrastructures. Second, Jackson's most loyal constituency—the black community and especially black churches—presently seems to lack the patience, resources and ideological wherewithal to engage in prolonged political organization. And lastly, black—and to a certain extent, Jackson's—allegiance to the Democratic Party diffuses energies which could be directed toward alternative political mobilization.

No one predicted the extent to which Jackson's campaign would electrify and energize black Americans—and provide an alternative to some nonblack Americans. He has received an astounding 20% of the popular vote in the Democratic primaries—including 25.5% of the vote in New York, 23% in New Jersey, 21% in Georgia, 20.8% in Illinois, 19.4% in Alabama, and 17% in Pennsylvania. He won the primaries in Louisiana and Washington, D.C., and the caucus voting in South Carolina and Virginia. Jackson's vote-getting power among blacks has been phenomenal: 89% of the black vote in New York, 75% in New Jersey, 70% in Georgia, 74% in Illinois, 60% in Alabama and 74% in Pennsylvania. And though his support among nonblack voters has not been insignificant—he was preferred by 33% of Latinos in New York, for example—it has not been overly impressive.

The Jackson campaign has reached such surprising heights, in part, because his social democratic program occupies progressive space abandoned by the moderate agendas of the two front-runners, Walter Mondale and Gary Hart. The agendas of both Mondale and Hart are anchored in the neo-liberalism of social theorists like Robert Reich, Felix Rohatyn and Ira Magaziner: this neo-liberalism calls for modernizing industry, promoting high technology and retraining workers in order to compete on the international market, while making symbolic gestures

toward issues of social justice and environmental protection. Jackson's program, echoed earlier in the progressive stance of candidate George McGovern, is influenced by the social democratic thought of Ronald Walters, Robert Brown, and Tom Hayden. It aims to increase regulation and taxation of huge corporations, make vast cuts in the military budget, expand educational and service programs for the poor, and revamp U.S. foreign policies toward Europe, Japan, and especially toward Third World nations. Beneath the poignant rhetoric of black pride and empowerment of the excluded, Jackson's agenda consists of updating New Deal programs under post-industrial capitalist conditions. His basic aim is to revive the progressive wing of the Democratic Party.

Jackson's controversial positions on U.S. foreign policies have made it difficult to achieve this aim. By refusing to succumb to the knee-jerk anti-communism which has regulated political discourse on foreign affairs in the U.S. since World War II, he has posed a major challenge to the Democratic Party. Jackson has persistently highlighted the plight of black South Africans under the apartheid Botha regime, a scandal given but slight attention by the Democratic Party. He has openly sided with the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, supported negotiations with the so-called rebels in El Salvador, and condemned the Marcos government in the Philippines—and has been politely shunned by the Democratic Party. Most importantly, Jackson has called for a redirection of Middle East policy that would recognize the interests of Arab nations and acknowledge the deplorable situation of Palestinians inside Israel and in the occupied territories.

This courageous move to interrogate U.S. Middle East policies has been the novel issue in the Jackson campaign. For decades it has been difficult to discuss Middle East policy on its merits, and not least among Democratic Party leaders. The party relies on Jews for ideas, leadership, and

money. Unquestioning support of Israel has been a source of personal identity for many in the American Jewish community, it is a secular substitute for Judaism—resulting, at times, in chauvinistic viewpoints. Such automatic solidarity may be diminishing. Both in the U.S. and Israel, and even among many who consider themselves Zionists, unwavering U.S. deference to Israeli policy is being questioned as a disservice to Israel as well as this country. To some Jews as well as others, what Jackson had to say at the policy level made better sense than the fawning appeal made by Walter Mondale and Gary Hart with their promise to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

But Jackson muddied the waters badly by his inexcusably crude references to Jews ("Hymie" and "Hymietown"). His supporter, Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam, made matters worse by his description of Hitler as "wickedly great," his threats of violence against black "traitors," and his despicable characterization of Judaism as a "dirty" (or "gutter") religion. Given the history of anti-Semitism and the reality of its latent power for evil, these incidents alienated even some highly progressive Jews (including those in socialist organizations such as DSA), and they were exploited to the hilt by spokespersons for the Jewish establishment and by some passionately pro-Israeli publications like *The New Republic*.

From a black perspective, Louis Farrakhan's threatening demeanor and wild words hold less longterm significance than his decision to lead the Nation of Islam away from separatism into the electoral process. Jackson's use of "Hymie" was a holdover from ghetto talk, deeply offensive outside that context, not necessarily so within. Researchers into Jackson's past have come up with a handful of quotations that are employed as proof of anti-Semitism. Most are simply realistic assessments of

the inequalities built into the black-Jewish alliance on civil rights issues; perhaps one or two are troubling with hints of anti-Semitic residues in his language, but even these are cited out of context. In sum, the evidence hardly warrants the charge. But, as Jackson is not the first to discover, the label of staunch anti-Semite attaches very readily to anyone seriously critical of Israel.

A further factor helping to explain the tendentious critiques of Jackson is the transformation of numerous middle-class liberal Jewish voters into moderate and even conservative elements within both major parties. Quite apart from his specific challenges to Middle East policy, Jackson's efforts to forge a progressive "rainbow coalition" accenting the needs of the poor and new foreign policies favoring the third world have prompted negative responses among those, including Jews, who once led the old liberal coalition.

Both now and in the future, this complex situation represents a serious problem for Jackson. Open debate of Middle East policy is important to world peace as well as to U.S. and Israeli agendas, but anyone who wants to challenge past policies from within the political mainstream risks being pushed into political oblivion. The success of Jackson's effort to reconstitute the progressive wing of the Democratic Party may well turn on his ability to campaign visibly and credibly against anti-Semitism while continuing to address Middle East questions with candor. Given the explosive power of the Middle East in American politics, what Jackson does or fails to do in this respect may spell doom or triumph for the social democratic agenda in the Democratic Party.

The second reason Jackson's campaign has attained such surprising heights is that it emerged just as the black freedom movement reached its nadir. This movement faltered badly in the seventies principally owing to the reversion of the black left to antiquated forms of orthodox Marxism in the

face of the consolidation of the petit bourgeois black political class. Needless to say, this reversion further distanced the black left from the mainstream of the black community. This encapsulating reversion can be primarily accounted for by the exorbitant and excessive hopes invested in black nationalist ideology by the black left in the late sixties and early seventies. Soon it became apparent that this ideology primarily advanced the emergence and development of the black political class—with minimal results for the black poor. The black left adopted crude Marxist rhetorics devoid of effective strategies and tactics.

In 1980, two significant efforts were made to bring together black leftist forces: the founding of the National Black United Front (headed by the Rev. Herbert Daughtry) and the National Black Independent Political Party, led by the Rev. Ben Chavis. Groups have had trouble sustaining themselves, though at present the former remains much more potent than the latter. Jackson's candidacy provided an ideal terrain of serious political engagement for both groups. The refusal of major figures of the black political class-notably Mayor Andrew Young of Atlanta, Richard Arrington of Birmingham, Coleman Young of Detroit, Wilson Goode of Philadelphia, Congressman Charles Rangel (Powell's successor) of New York and State Representative Julian Bond of Georgia—to support Jackson's candidacy ensured the attraction of more radical forces to Jackson and his own attention to their progressive perspectives. In addition to the more leftist-oriented members of the black political class who encouraged Jackson to run for office (persons like Congressmen Ronald Dellums and John Conyers), Jackson openly courted and won the support of the leaders of both black leftist groups; both Daughtry and Chavis have played highly visible and substantial roles in Jackson's campaign.

It is important to note that Jackson's vocation as a black Christian Baptist preacher endeared him to many grassroots Afro-Americans. A near majority of black Americans are Christians and most black Christians are of the Baptist denomination. The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.—led by the Rev. T.J. Jemison—is the largest black group in the country, with over seven million members, so that Jemison's endorsement of Jackson was noteworthy. Furthermore, most black clergypersons and laity supported Jackson, often permitting their churches to be used for rallies, meeting places and sites for voter registration. As already noted, even the legendary Black Muslims, encouraged by Farrakhan, broke with tradition and voted for Jackson.

The Jackson campaign has brought together the broadest united front in black America since the days of the great Martin Luther King, Jr. This display of black unity has been incredible and impressive-and has had an immeasurable symbolic effect on black Americans, especially poor black Americans. For example, this past April in New York City's Harlem, there took place one of the largest rallies ever held in this famous district. Speakers included a socialist like myself, a Marxist-Leninist like the poet and playwright Amiri Baraka, leading black clergypersons, local black politicians, Herbert Daughtry, Indian leaders, Latino and Asian figures, white religionists, ecologists, and peace activists and two courageous Jewish spokesmen. And, on election day in Harlem, some black people -many voting for the first time-were seen dancing in the streets.

Most black people did not expect Jackson to win the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party. In a recent poll, only 16% of black Americans voted with such expectation. Rather, black people sense in the Jackson campaign a black America coming-of-age-a prideful flexing of black political muscle and a bold entrance onto the national and international political scene. In

this regard, the Jackson candidacy is more a crusade of existential assertion and political unity than a campaign for party nomination and national office.

The Jackson campaign—with little money, no television advertisements and few radio announcements—will be the most memorable feature of the quest for the 1984 Democratic Party nomination. It has been a protracted struggle which magnificently mobilized the black community and some others around electoral politics, inadvertently polarized black and Jewish Americans, and tried to resuscitate the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. Jackson's fiery moralistic rhetoric and flashy messianic style contrasted sharply with the glib discourses and bland manners of his opponents. And his intelligent and mellow mediating role in their thirteen televised debates displayed a maturity and statesmanship that stunned much of white America. Like DePriest, Dawson, and Powell, Jackson is a trailblazer in black politics; his campaign opens new frontiers. Yet, unlike them, Jackson has never won an election and will not hold political office in the near future. Therefore, the future of Jesse Jackson remains open and the full significance of his historic campaign is still to be determined. But there is no doubt that black politics has reached a new stage because of this charismatic black Baptist preacher.

Reconstructing the American Left

The challenge of the Jackson campaign to the American left is twofold. First, the prominence of international issues, especially Africa and the Middle East, splits the left into two basic camps: full-fledged proponents and reticent supporters of national self-determination. The major test cases are Afghanistan, El Salvador, Ireland, Israel, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Poland and Southern Africa. Each case, of course, is a highly complex matter. But full-fledged proponents for self-determination

of nations tend to oppose Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, support the democratic elements of the guerilla forces in El Salvador, the IRA in Ireland, the PLO in the Middle East, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, the PLA in the Philippines, Solidarity in Poland and SWAPO and ANC in Southern Africa. Reticent supporters of national self-determination, on the other hand, unequivocally condemn Soviet interventionism in Afghanistan, support the land reform "movement" in El Salvador, choose no sides in Ireland, uneasily yet consistently endorse Israeli policies, equivocate on their support of the Sandinistas, morally oppose the Marcos regime, enthusiastically approve of Solidarity and, when reminded of South Africa, endorse moderate forces resisting apartheid.

The line of demarcation here is not simply the depth and scope of opposition to U.S. and Soviet imperialism; it also is the degree to which one breaks with European, Soviet and American ethnocentrism. Those most willing to do so have been civic republicans like I.F. Stone and Sheldon Wolin, independent Marxists like Paul Sweezy and Harry Magdoff, self-styled anarchists like Noam Chomsky and leftist people of color such as Edward Said and Randall Robinson. Most present-day populists, fervent feminists, utopian communitarians and bourgeois socialists have failed to raise their voices in this regard -they remain captive to Euro-American ethnocentrism.

The second challenge of the Jackson campaign to the American left is the presence of relative black unity. Since this unity transcends class and gender in the black community, it blurs left perceptions. In the eyes of some white leftists, black unity flows from "right-wing" populist appeals; for others, it reeks of anti-whitism, anti-Semitism and some glib Third Worldism. Black unity indeed consists of diverse and contradictory elements.

It is neither accusatory nor exclusivistic. Rather it is a creative response to the state of siege raging in working class and underclass black communities and households. Even with black petit bourgeois leadership, this response, for the most part, cannot but be progressive in its basic orientation owing to the constituency it brings together. Yet, the white leftist reactions to black unity efforts have rarely been salutary. And the white leftist assessments of the Jackson campaign have been, in the view of most black activists, highly disappointing—and revealing. The possibility for progressive interracial solidarity remains, yet it has been made more difficult to realize. Again select civic republicans, small sectors of socialists, and feminists, larger segments of the new populists and vast numbers of people of color positively responded to the black unity efforts enacted in the Jackson campaign; others of the American left were found wanting.

The basic lesson to be learned from the Jackson campaign is the need for a reconstruction of the American left. Crucial to this reconstruction is the centrality of anti-imperialist and anti-racist sentiments. This reconstruction requires not simply that former leftists be written out of the new realignment of progressive forces, but also that they be viewed for what in fact they are: often morally right regarding the evils they oppose but not politically left in the alternatives they endorse. This holds especially for mainstream peace activists, establishmentarian ecologists, moderate black politicians, liberal feminists, social democratic cold warriors and ethnocentric bourgeois socialists. Opposition to militarism, environmental abuse, racism, sexism, Soviet imperialism and economic injustice is morally right; yet the nuclear freeze, expansion of environmental protection, black presence in political office, ERA, support for Sakharov (often at the expense of eliding Nelson Mandela of South Africa or Father de la Torres of the Philippines) and endorsement of Israel's right

to exist are liberal, not leftist, stances. They all surely are worthy of leftist support but not as displacements of more progressive concerns, but rather as stepping stones to more fundamental issues. At the moment, the American left must sharpen its relation to left-liberalism, not because it no longer takes seriously precious liberal values of individual liberties, church and state separation and governmental checks and balances, but rather because left-liberals are unreliable allies to those progressives who take seriously anti-imperialist and anti-racist concerns.

Will a realignment of the left around anti-imperialism and relative black unity lead to political oblivion? I think not. First, it is important to acknowledge that most of the American left is already politically oblivious. So the loss would not be a net loss. More pointedly, as struggles in Central America, the Middle East, Poland, Ireland, Latin America and South Africa intensify, crucial leftist choices must be made regarding these international affairs. Furthermore, the efforts for black unity and the political articulation of people of color in this country is now sophisticated enough to link its concerns with the downtrodden white working poor and the morally sensitive white middle class—as evidenced in the Jackson campaign. So on the domestic front political pressure is brought to bear on the Democratic Party to either embrace or exclude progressive forces. If it chooses the former, leftist possibilities loom large within the two-party system; if it chooses the latter, the only alternative becomes that of wholesale assault on the two-party system with the creation of a third political party. Most Jackson supporters, parts of the Citizens' Party, elements of DSA, unorganized radical intellectuals and even some pragmatic sectarians would jump at this opportunity if it could become a credible option.

Are anti-imperialism and anti-racism mere outdated leftist slogans with little political substance and strategic effectiveness? Are these concerns antiquated expressions of a bygone modern era eclipsed by postmodern sentiments regarding the technological abuse of nature, the subjugation of women and the marginalization of gays and lesbians? If my earlier analysis of the historical components of the American left is anywhere near the mark, the possibilities for widespread domestic radicalism are highly unlikely. This means that American leftists must give first priority to the most explosive issues in American society, namely, the probability of U.S. participation in international war principally owing to imperialist policies (esp. in Central America and the Middle East), and the plight of the urban black and brown poor primarily due to the legacy of racism in an ever-changing capitalist economy. Preoccupation with legitimate postmodern emancipatory projects must not overlook the lingering problems of imperialist and racist oppression promoted by the American powers that be.

The concrete consequences of American leftist attention to these two explosive issues are more intense involvement in anti-interventionist movements and more substantive support for the institutionalization of a progressive rainbow coalition (more than likely) outside the Democratic Party. Such involvement and support must surely embrace postmodern emancipatory projects. Yet, given the present American terrain and the deep crisis of U.S. radicalism, a mature left must first and foremost direct its energies toward the struggles of oppressed third world peoples and toward the plight of its most downtrodden domestic citizens.

Presently, most of the American left dangles in the balance, caught between opposing a dangerous and conservative administration and a wavering and centrist Democratic Party. The

challenge of the Jackson campaign is that anti-imperialist and open-ended black unity forces may set the terms for a realignment of progressive forces which take us far beyond the knee-jerk pessimism and habitual paralysis of the American Left. There are progressive possibilities beyond this predicament, but only a reconstructed left can fulfill them.